



METHOD FOR CONTROLLING THE DYNAMIC RANGE OF A HEARING AID, AND METHOD TO MANUFACTURE DIFFERENT HEARING AIDS, AND A HEARING AID.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to a method for controlling the dynamic range defined in the preamble of claim 1, a method for manufacturing different kinds of hearing aids exhibiting different transfer functions as defined in the preamble of claim 6, further a hearing aid fitted with at least one acoustic/electric input transducer defined in the preamble of claim 7 and also an electromechanical transducer defined in the preamble of claim 12.

Typical hearing aids comprise at least one acoustic/electric input transducer followed by a signal processing unit of which the output drives an electric/mechanical transducer. As regards digital hearing aids, the signal processing unit is correspondingly digital and comprises an input-side analog/digital converter and as called for an output-side digital/analog converter. This is the case both for in-ear hearing aids and behind-the-ear hearing aids, the output-side electric/mechanical transducer usually being in the form of a loudspeaker unit fitted with a drive coil, but it applies also to implant hearing aids (cochlea implant) of which the output-side electric/mechanical transducer is fitted with a mechanical drive element.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The objective of the present invention is to make it possible for such a hearing aid -- where the term also definitely includes ear phones and hearing accessories for hearing-impaired individuals -- to adjust the particular appropriate dynamic range using the simplest means. To that end the initially cited control method is characterized in that the input impedance of the acoustic/mechanical transducer is selective switched.

Accordingly the invention is based on the insight that the dynamic range set at a hearing aid of the cited kind, depends also in significant manner on the input impedance of the electric/mechanical transducer. Simply by switching this input impedance to different impedance values, the said dynamic range then can be selected in very easy manner. As regards hearing accessories, the dynamic range can be changed according to the hearing

impairment to be remedied or, depending on locale, it may be changed according to the perceived acoustic environment, or, with respect to ear phones, according to the requirements at the time.

Selective switching of the input impedance can be implemented in a preferred embodiment of the method of the invention when fitting the hearing aid, in particular the hearing accessory, for instance by the audiologist, in order to attain a desired dynamic range.

In addition to or instead of the selective input-impedance switching during hearing-aid fitting, the invention proposes that the switching be carried out by means of the signal processing unit, that is in adaptation to the particular acoustic environment.

Moreover the switching of the input impedance may be carried out automatically as mentioned above by means of signal processing, and/or it may be initiated outside the hearing aid, whether manually at the hearing aid itself, in particular as regards an ear phone or an outside-the-ear hearing accessory, for instance by remote control, if called for and preferably in combination with a remote control driving the signal processing unit.

The concept of the invention also makes it possible to manufacture various kinds of hearing accessories in more economical manner than when a particular model-specific dynamic zone must be implemented per se in terms of hardware and software for each particular model. According the above-cited manufacturing process, this goal of the invention is attained in that the various hearing-aid models exhibit the same design and in that the dynamic range specific to a given model is set by selectively switching the input impedance of the electric/mechanical transducer. In this way the manufacture of various hearing-aid models can be focused on the manufacture of a single basic model of a hearing aid, and to select thereupon by means of the switching of the invention the particular required dynamic range.

The above technical problem can be solved concretely by a hearing aid of the invention defined in claim 7 and including preferred embodiment variations defined in claims 8 through 11.

Claim 12 moreover proposes an electro-mechanical transducer for a hearing aid with integrated means to carry out the method of the invention. In this manner the invention offers a transducer module allowing simple manufacture and which can be integrated directly, so that additional and considerable assembly steps can be avoided in the manufacture of the hearing

aid.

> BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The invention is illustratively elucidated below in relation to the attached Figures.

Fig. 1 is a simplified functional-block and signal-flow diagram showing the principle of the method or of a hearing aid of the invention with an integrated transducer of the invention,

Fig. 2 schematically shows an electric/mechanical transducer unit of the invention in the form of a loudspeaker module and fitted with an inductive source to carry out the control method of the invention, and

Fig. 3 schematically shows various ways of implementing the input-impedance control of the invention.

> DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

As shown in Fig. 1, a hearing aid, for instance an ear phone or -- and in particular -- a behind-the-ear or in-ear hearing accessory, though also a cochlear implant, comprises an input-side acoustic/electric transducer followed by a signal processing unit 3 which in the case of a digital hearing aid shall be a digital processor unit. An electric/mechanical transducer 5 is present at the output side of the signal processing unit 3.

As schematically indicated in Fig. 1, the transducer unit 5 includes the actual mechanical/electric transducer 5a exhibiting an impedance "e" at the input E5 of the transducer unit 5. In the invention, the input impedance e of the transducer 5a can be switched, by the switch 7 driven by means of a control input S, to various impedances e1, e2... in the manner schematically shown in Fig. 1. As shown in dashed lines in Fig. 1, the invention provides

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switches which by means of a control input S allow switching the input impedance e of the output-side electric/mechanical transducer to given, previously selected impedances.

As shown in Fig. 3, the control of input-impedance switching basically can be carried out manually, whether by direct local action Loc on a switching element or by a remote drive Rem, in particular using remote control anyway present to drive the signal processing unit. The particular selective control of the input impedance e of the electric/mechanical transducer lower -- possibly in combination with manual control -- also can be automatically initiated by the signal processing unit 3 as shown in Fig. 1. In this manner and in practically adaptive manner, the dynamic range of the hearing aid can be made to automatically follow the switched-on operational mode at the processing unit and moreover practically as a function of the acoustic environment.

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Depending on the design of the mechanical/electric transducer, in particular of its discrete impedance elements determining the input impedance, the switch 7 can be a separate and independent unit integrated between the output of the signal processing unit 3 and the input of said transducer. Preferably, and as also shown in Fig. 2, such a switch shall be integrated into a modular, electric/mechanical transducer 15.

Fig. 2 schematically shows an electric/mechanical transducer 17 conventionally used in such a transducer module 15 of hearing aids and in the form of a loudspeaker fitted with an inductive drive 19. Illustratively the drive 19 comprises two coils 19a, 19b. These coils 19a, 19b and connected either in series or parallel by the switch 17 and as a result the input impedance of the module 15 which is determined at least in part by said coils shall be switched. Obviously more than two states of input impedance may be easily attained in selectively switched manner, namely by selectively connecting the discrete impedances provided either in parallel or in series circuits and thus to implement the particular desired input impedance.

As regards a hearing accessory, any requiring fitting, in particular of the transfer function of the signal processing unit by the audiologist to the particular individual requirements, is carried out by initially switching ON the particular desired input impedance. Such a switching configuration can then be retained until there is a need for modification, again carried out by an expert such as the audiologist, or, if based on the initial setting, it may be carried out automatically or manually by the wearer switching the input impedance while using the hearing aid. By providing a reset feature, for instance by manually actuating the signal processing unit, a preferred option is attained, namely to reset the cited input impedance anytime to the expert's initial setting.

On one hand the method of the invention allows switching the hearing-aid dynamic range using the very simplest means, and on the other hand, as regards the manufacture of hearing aids differing only by their dynamic ranges, to manufacture them simultaneously and to freeze the class of model only after manufacture proper by selecting said input impedance and hence the dynamic range, and possibly only by fitting by an expert such as said audiologist.